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ABSTRACT

A contemporary theory of behavior is that faulty patterns of thinking divide the criminal from the noncriminal. The causation of school violence is children choosing to be violent; and the problem of school violence is acceptance of their choice. Short-term control measures are adherence to systematic school rules, use of technology, security consciousness, innovative people programs, and teachers trained or experienced in handling disruptive students. Long-term control measures stem from a redefinition of the role of the school. School administrators must recognize that their responsibility ends when the student makes a choice not to behave. In addition, administrators must demand that the criminal justice system respond to their needs. The long tradition of excusing criminal behavior because the offender is a child must end. Finally, in our individual lives, we must reassess our own behavior. Support of public media that sell violence cannot be continued. The long-term control of school violence will be attained when children recognize that criminal behavior will not be tolerated and parents recognize that they are responsible for their children. (Author/MLF)

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VIOLENT SOCIETY, VIOLENT SCHOOLS

It's a question of choice

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It's a Question of Choice

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The issue of school violence and school vandalism is one of the most perplexing problems facing society in the 1980s. It is a problem that has been with us a long time, seems to get worse, and appears to resist even the most persistent efforts to neutralize its cancerous growth.

This paper will address itself to the problem through an interpretation of the available research data, a review of motivational theory and recommended procedures for control of school violence. The paper will concern itself with the overt act by an individual who causes another person to be injured (violence) or property to be damaged or destroyed (vandalism). Those accidental acts by a person(s) or the natural wear and tear of property through use by large numbers of persons are not considered here.

To aid in understanding, the two terms herein under discussion, violence and vandalism, will be termed violence unless otherwise noted.

RESEARCH DATA INTERPRETATION: HOW BAD IS IT?

The problem of describing school violence is difficult because of the confusing facts and statements made about it. The studies of school violence read in the same fashion as the Chinese visitor who, when asked to give his impression of America, said:

> Funny people, you Americans. You take a glass, put in sugar to make it sweet, add lemon to make it sour. You put in gin to warm you up, and ice to keep you cool. You say, "Here's to you!" and then you drink it yourself!

This growing body of research data has gained much in sophistication in recent years, but still has a long way to go. The media headlines shock us into believing our schools are inhabited by hundreds of violence-prone children. They read that 97% of our high school kids are involved in one mass orgy after another. Perhaps they should read that 97% of our children did not get into trouble today.

School Violence Research

Let's take a quick look at what we know. The incident rate and cost estimates of school violence vary. If we could find an average figure, it would read that on an annual basis:

1. 282,000 students are attacked;
2. 5,000 teachers are attacked;
3. 6,000 teachers are robbed;
4. 9,000 students and teachers are sexually assaulted;
5. Rape has increased 54% over last year.

This seems shocking, but take a second look. We have an interpretation problem. There is no standard definition of what we are talking about. Consider the term "attacked". We don't know if that includes an accidental bump or a beating. The same is true of robbery. Is this by threat, force or is this a child stealing a dime from teacher's desk? Sexual assault is equally unclear. Does this include a crude reference of intent, or is this a physical assault? What is meant by a 54% increase? What were the actual numbers? Finally, how many of these incidents would be reportable if they occurred off the school grounds? Much of what is forbidden in school is ignored off campus. A wise crack forbidden in the classroom is tolerated in public. The initial problem in understanding school violence is the lack of a standard baseline. A comparative problem.

Does the violent school criminal exist, and what do we know about him? Our data average describes him as:

1. A male, urban junior high student whose most common crime is theft of property valued at $1.00 to $10.00;
2. He is a student enrolled in the school where he committed his act;
3. He is a racial minority and he victimized members of his own minority group;
4. He chose victims of his own age and sex. One of nine victims is injured, although the injury seldom requires medical attention;
5. Teachers were usually threatened with violence, but seldom attacked; Male teachers are more likely his target; and
6. Compared with white criminals, he was twice as active.

Is there a relationship between academic performance and the school criminal? Although this is a tantalizing thought, and subject to much discussion, there is no clear-cut answer. Opinion reflects that:

1. Teachers who teach low-ability students are attacked and robbed at significantly higher levels than teachers who teach average-ability children;
2. Teachers of underachievers are twice as likely to be attacked and robbed as teachers of average-ability kids;
3. Schools with high racial minority populations show both a higher rate of school failure and violence than other schools that are predominantly white.

Fear of Crime

These results of research into school violence make me uneasy. Compared with the headlines, they are tame. When we expect to hear about terrible crimes, such as we see in our media, the picture of a thirteen year old petty thief is disappointing.

The differential between what we expected to find out and what we discovered can be partially accounted for. The research reports do not record those singular dramatic instances that leave us speechless: rape, murder, arson, etc. They are rare, but their influence is long-lasting and contributes to another factor that may be more influential than actual crime. That is fear—the fear of being a victim. While this is a difficult concept to measure, there is ample suggestion that students, teachers, administrators and parents fear school violence at a magnitude that far outweighs its reality. The fear of violence affects more people to a

greater extent than does actual violence. Fear is difficult to extinguish. It is intensely personal. It dominates awareness and perceptual vigilance.

THE QUESTION OF WHY

If school violence or fear of violence is as bad as it seems, the next questions are: "How can we account for the violence we have?" and "Why do we allow our children to engage in violent behavior?"

Societal Acceptance of Crime

It is difficult to read a paper or watch a television program without confronting the violence that we as Americans accept as part of our daily lives. Our communications industry makes it possible to witness theft, robbery, murder, rape and incest as part of prime time entertainment. Television, movies and books bring violence into our homes at a rate and with an impact never before experienced. Graphic display is only part of the picture. Mixed in is a powerful suggestion of acceptable behavior. If you're having problems at work—drink. If you want to influence someone—yell loudly. Witness, on one Sunday evening family TV show, we listen as a divorced woman explains her affair to her teenage daughters. They listen and respond with laughter and snappy jokes. Another family show features students arguing with the teacher. Classmates listen and laugh. The teacher is cool—she understands and isn't offended. Popular trade books on the best seller lists detail the most intimate techniques of sexual practice, rape and murder. Newspapers advertise the latest movie, "Fun Time Girls", and tell you they only sell ads. They don't

support pornography.

If you will look at your life in America today, I believe you will be dismayed at the quantity and quality of the violence you see. Psychologically, it is this personal involvement that makes us react so deeply when that which we accept finds its way into our schools. A perceptive visitor to our country might remark that our acceptance seems to carry a fascination and excitement that we need and yet fear, an attraction that we find irresistable, yet horrifying when we see it in the eyes of our children.

MOTIVATION: A HISTORICAL JOURNEY

The question of causation can be divided into several schools of thought. Each school has its particular bias and its champion. The history of crime has witnessed each in its heyday and the practices of modern criminal justice is a collage of the influence of each.

Psychoanalysis

The most dominant causation theory is that which comes from the brilliant work of Sigmund Freud. While not interested in crime per se, Freud's ideas have influenced psychiatry, psychology and criminology for sixty years. Using the knowledge of the late 1800s, Freud postulated a two-layered functional brain. One layer we consciously experience; the other is present, but unknown to us. The unknown brain is seen as a powerful and demanding force. Primitive instincts from man's developmental past are just below its surface. If the surface of this unknown should crack, just a little, we could without conscious choice burst into an orgy of violence and destruction. Only a tenuous censure, educated through parental training,

school and society stands between us and potential disaster. Crime, according to this approach, is a product of these unconscious forces in conflict with societal restrictions. The offender makes no conscious choice about his or her behavior. He is motivated by the unknown.

Learning Theory

A second approach to causation comes from the work of the American learning theorists from 1900 to 1940. Using knowledge gained from laboratory studies with basic animals (rats, cats, chickens, fish and worms), these investigators have concluded that man learns his behavior. Crime is learned and the offender simply follows his or her lessons. To the question of who teaches the innocent child, the theorist quickly blames society, the ghetto or broken homes.

Sociological Theory

A third approach is represented by the sociology of 1950. Citing a statistical compilation of social groups, sociologists have developed a concept that poverty breeds crime. Hence if you give the poor money, they will not commit criminal acts. At the other end of the spectrum, they blamed the rich in government and industry for exploiting the masses. Civil disobedience is the only avenue available for the oppressed to seek meaning and success in life. Again, the explanation describes the offender as one who makes no conscious choice. He or she reacts to forces more powerful than they.

Other schools of thought could be described, but in each we would see the same underlying message: the offender is reacting to forces more power-

ful than he. He makes no choice to offend. He may behave in an offensive manner, but in the final analysis, he is innocent of responsibility for his behavior—and must be excused.

These schools of thought are out of date. They are based on information that is not adequate to the world we live in or the world we face. They contribute confusion.

A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT MOTIVATION

Perceptual Psychology and Choice

In 1958, two psychologists at the University of Florida published a seminal text entitled, Individual Behavior: A Perceptual Approach to Human Behavior (Snygg and Combs, 1958). This work brought together the seemingly dichotomous schools of existential philosophy and laboratory research in human perception. This marriage produced an offspring called perceptual theory. Its basic tenet is: Man behaves according to his perceptions of the world. He applies his individual experience to these perceptions and develops a stable set of beliefs about his world. Man, then, chooses his behavior according to what is meaningful to him. He makes a choice, a conscious choice, to behave or to offend. He is not driven, nor is he a helpless victim. He chooses to become a scoutmaster. He chooses to steal. He chooses to obey a traffic signal. He chooses to destroy a school room.

How does he come to develop this ability? Snygg and Combs (1958) suggest that very early in life, the infant begins to make choices. The problem is that adults don't recognize the infant's behavior as discriminating. The infant develops a rich repertoire of meanings based on his experience. He recognizes his mother's breast as a source of food. He may believe Uncle

Paul is a fearful object and scream in terror as the poor man attempts to comfort him. The repertoire may or may not include that complex of meanings later to be described as love. He may or may not recognize the value of property. Whatever meanings he develops come from his experience of his world. The earlier the perceptual meanings are developed, the more influential they become, and the more resistant to change.

Faulty Thinking Patterns

In 1976, two pioneers, Samuel Yochelson and Stanton Samenow, published volume one of their book, The Criminal Personality (Yochelson and Samenow, 1976). Summarizing twenty years of exhaustive research and experience at St. Elizabeth's Hospital with criminal psychopaths, they have succeeded in bringing the work of Snygg and Combs into criminology. By using the perceptual approach, they have identified faulty patterns of thinking as the factor that divides the criminal from the non-criminal. Faulty patterns of thinking about anger, pride, sex, authority, honesty are chosen by the criminal as his way of life. Patterns of criminal thinking formed from experience that began in the child's early years. The concept of criminal thinking at the age of six is not only possible, but probable.

This notion is at the heart of our discussion today. Lest anyone not understand what I am saying, I will repeat myself. We must recognize that patterns of criminal thinking begin in early age, develop and are refined just as beliefs about God and honor begin in the elementary years. Our difficulty in accepting this truth is that we don't want to accept that that cute little boy with the big smile, or that little girl with the pigtails, can be a criminal. If they steal teacher's lunch money, we excuse it. If they strike another child, shoot dope or break into a house, we excuse

them because they are so young and innocent. Our refusal to accept their behavior as chosen is accounted for in the following statistic. Using imprisonment as an indicator, Gregory Krohm of VPI (Business Week, 1976) estimates that a juvenile accused of a criminal act has about 12 out of 10,000 chances of imprisonment for any single offense. Further, Yochelson and Samenow have estimated that the average adult criminal has committed in excess of 2,000 individual crimes, criminal behavior that began as early as age six.

Finally, using conviction data as a measure, we must recognize that conviction rates only represent the single crime for which the child has been convicted, not what he has done. One 17 year old rapist had amassed 67 victims prior to his first arrest. Upon conviction, the judge gave him probation because this was his first offense!

The causation of crime in general, and school violence in particular, is choice. Children choosing to be violent. The problem of crime in general and school violence in particular, is our acceptance of their choice.

CONTROLLING SCHOOL VIOLENCE

The effective control program must have both short term components and a long term objective. Most schools find success with short term plans, but are unable to make much progress on a long term basis.

Short Term Measures

What are the most effective short term control measures used with school violence? The strongest suggestion from research indicates there is a positive relationship between laxness in enforcing school rules and

the rate of violent crime. This is clearest in the case of urban schools in high crime neighborhoods. Those schools which were indecisive or inconsistent in enforcing rules paid a heavy price. Related to enforcement is prompt exclusion of disruptive students. Suspension is favored over expulsion. Schools report that success is tied to a policy of systematic and predictable response.

Technology

Electronic surveillance has made great strides in recent years. There does exist today a technology that can best be described as astounding. Satellites orbiting the earth or stationary airborne platforms can receive, collate and transmit electronic signals from sensing devices in the rooms of your school building. Sensing devices that alert to a change of air pressure within a room. Sensing devices that detect heat change caused by a human body entering a room. Sensing devices that can trace the path of an unseen intruder crossing a school lawn in total darkness. Unbreakable windows, paint that resists ink, cameras that take pictures in near darkness and guard dogs trained to bark but not attack intruders. Specially trained school police officers.

The security industry has available a technology that will resist or inhibit all but the most determined intruder. The initial investment is high, the installation and maintenance cost is high, but security can be obtained at a price.

Security Consciousness

Security consciousness can reduce violence. Stairwells, dead end

corridors and secluded spots behind decorative plants are popular locations for assault, entry and use of controlled substances. Staff and student movement can be organized by route, time of travel and coordination with authorities. Security-consciousness should be a prime concern in remodeling and new building construction plans.

People Programs

Innovative people programs can reduce violence by encouraging cooperative behavior among students and faculty alike. Pride, responsibility and rewards are powerful motivators of human behavior. Subway crime has been reduced in one city by youth gangs assuming a protector role. Hall and campus patrols, good citizenship awards and peer policing yield positive results. Weekend work programs, behavioral contracting, security advocates and citizen accountability boards are productive. Two lessons that are at the heart of this approach: One, by simply acting in a public way, you will encourage security consciousness and reduce crime. Two, you are giving those who have the least say in school operations, the students, an opportunity to participate in a meaningful way.

Teacher Education

Much of waht is required in teacher education is of little use to the classroom teacher facing a defiant student. Despite their awareness of the needs of teachers, the teacher education departments in universities across the nation have ignored the teachers' pleas. They have continued to grind out a training curriculum that, with rare exception, does not contain a single required course in discipline, classroom control, mental health, juvenile law, etc. Only through the recent American Bar Association-Law Related Education Program has an awareness of the character of violence influenced

teacher education.

School boards can influence teacher education. At your next meeting, accept a policy that states you will not employ teachers who do not have training and/or experience in handling disruptive students. Send a copy to your state universities. At your next state convention, pass a state-wide resolution—they will get the message.

Those persons opposed to the military drafting of women into combat might look at American education. If school violence is as serious as we believe it to be, we have had women in combat for many years. We have sent them into the battle without training, weapons or recognition. Male teachers share a similar fate.

Long-Term Measures

The long term control of school violence will require a fundamental change in our present patterns of behavior. We cannot continue our acceptance of violence unless we are willing to pay an increasing price with the safety of our children and teachers. If we are unwilling to curb the violent behavior of some of our youth, then schools must be constructed like banks. Fortresses for safety—not education.

The problem is not our knowing what must be done. There is right and wrong. There does exist a pattern of behavior that we have defined as right. We need not apologize for it. We need not justify its existence. We need only to stand our ground and confirm its existence. This will not be easy.

In his book, Whatever Became of Sin? Dr. Karl Menninger (Menninger, 1975) tells the story of Elijah Lovejoy. This story best illustrates the challenge we face.

> Elijah Lovejoy was a successful preacher, yet he left the pulpit and returned to his previous life as a newspaperman. He wanted people to hear his words and he knew he could only reach a pitiful few in church. Lovejoy had witnessed a slave lynching, and it so sickened him that he swore he would forever destroy the accepted practice of slavery. Publishing one treatise after another, he provoked the wrath of one and all. Mobs tried to destroy his presses. Threats and beatings followed, but Lovejoy said, "If by compromise you mean that I should cease from my duty, I cannot make it. I fear God more than I fear man. Crush me if you will, but I shall die at my post." And he did, four days later, at the hands of another mob. Not one of the ruffians was prosecuted or indicted or punished in any way for this murder. In fact, those who defended Lovejoy were prosecuted, and one of his assasins was later elected mayor of Alton, Illinois.

To control school violence we must question not only our personal acceptance of violence, but we must redefine our concept of the role of the school and our belief about the right to be educated. Schools must operate for one purpose: to educate future citizens. Schools must divest themselves of responsibility for the total life of its students. If the student will not behave in school, or refuses to participate, the school must recognize its responsibility ended when the student made a choice not to

behave. This doesn't mean we wouldn't give a second chance when he does choose to behave. It means that children are accountable for their behavior.

Schools must demand that the criminal justice system respond to its needs. Courts, administrators and school boards must recognize that a criminal act is a criminal act, no matter where it occurs. The long tradition of excusing criminal behavior because the offender is a child must end. The long tradition of allowing parents freedom without responsibility in the raising of their children must cease. Parents must be held responsible for providing a healthy home where children learn right from wrong, where children learn respect and control of themselves. Parents cannot be allowed to throw their failures on the doorstep of the school.

As a nation, we must take a serious look at the balance between individual civil rights and the civil rights of the collective society. At what point do the rights of society surpass those of the individual? At what point do the rights of society surpass the question of judicial procedure? These are fundamental questions. They are difficult questions. They must be answered.

Finally, in our individual lives, we must reassess our own behavior. We cannot continue to support a public media that sells violence. We must send a message to these industries that we will no longer tolerate the present bill of fare. We are sick of violence.

The long term control of school violence will be attained when our children recognize that criminal behavior will not be tolerated. When parents recognize that they are responsible for their children. When you and I, as elected school boards, say to the public, "That is it. We will tolerate no more."

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